

“A Note on New Initiative and Campaign for Food Security”

Vibrancy of any society or system lies in extermination of conditions that lead to food insecurity. We can measure the progress of the society not by looking at rooftops or luxurious automobiles but health of its people. The health of the people is measured not at the apex level of society but its bottom line. This line consists in its BPL, Antyodaya families and other kinds of dependent groups who need food security one way or the other. Even those who are well off also suffer from syndrome of hidden hunger, which is nothing but the absence of proper nutrients that help to fight diseases and promote immunity and good health. Keeping all these factors in mind and also the appalling levels of anaemia, night blindness and bone related diseases in Gujarat state, it was decided by the concerned department to initiate a fortification movements where by flour would be laced with iron and folic acid and edible oil with Vitamin A and D. This idea was mooted in the Conference of Food Secretaries in September, 2005 at Mumbai- India and was followed by a series of meetings with the oil millers and flour miller owners in the State. It was explained to them that such mixing would not lose its potency during the process nor needed higher temperature nor need be sourced to non-vegetarians origin. This was stressed to gain acceptance levels. Since companies in India are indigenously manufacturing premix vitamins, therefore, there was no need for going for imports. Furthermore, rule 32-A of Food and Drug Rules allows labeling of food products constituted of vitamins or nutrients and there is nothing in the rules which prohibits the fortification of oil nor does it explicitly prescribe the standards like it has been done for Vanaspati. The Food and Drug Administration in the past had been trying to disallow such fortification on grounds of non-prescription of standards in the Rules but there is absolutely nothing prohibiting from going ahead with this fortification exercise provided the International Units estimated to be present in such fortification do not change.

Oil fortification is achievable at three levels:

- a) Millers; b) Packers, and c) Refineries

There are millers more than 600 in the Gujarat State who crush oil of all types. Up till now, they were selling loose oil but by tightening the implementation of the edible oil packaging order under which no oil can be traded, sold or transported without being packed the department has been able to achieve the edible oil enrichment goal through a tight enforcement of packaging orders and by asking

either the packers at the back end or the millers at the front end to pack oil along with an admixture of vitamin A & D for nutritive requirements. So far, there is no clear statute or notification by which it has been made compulsory. Yet this has been mandatorily possible due to an intense private public partnership mode. In this partnership, the Government of India's capital assistance through Food Processing Ministry up to 50% or Rs.3 lakhs and state Govts' commitment to train and design the equipment are involved. Demonstrations were undertaken for its installation along with technical presentations on the intricate issues of temperature, absorption and filtering of waste. It was made also clear that if in case the millers were unable to add or fortify the oil at front end, this burden would be carried out by the packers at back end but in no case could the whole consignment be sold without being packed or fortified since, it would mean violation of packaging order. Several dieticians, experts on nutrition other than Government functionaries spoke to the millers in several meetings to promote a sense of commitment to this goal in this state which is ridden by vitamin deficiency. Problems were explained and discussed upon the whole process of fortification from the health angle to bring home the point that several crores of rupees were spent wastefully for treatment of diseases. It was stressed that several cases of malnutrition could be averted if the required vitamin fortification was carried out.

As of now, every day 600 MT of groundnut oil and also of cotton seed oil are packed and fortified other than 300 MT of other edible oil like Soyabean, Palmolein in this process. The process has been made more people friendly through messages and hoardings backed by enforcement measures of packaging rules. As a result of this contribution, one can see pouches ranging from 500gm to 15 litre tin with a special logo name 'H' (signifying the health fortification of the oil) in the market and major refineries like NDDB (National Dairy Development Board), Adani Wilmar Ltd, Gokul, Maruti etc. have also embraced this programme unhesitatingly. Questions of FDA (Food and Drug Administration) standards for oil fortification are raised but all these have been consigned to background due to proactive role of millers and refineries in this process.

On the other side of the fortification drive, a common cereal named Wheat consumed in this state is also included for flour fortification with Iron and folic acid. Wheat is consumed and sold more commonly in the open private market through network of flour millers and medium millers. The flour millers had been contacted for this process and we have been able to rope in all the 39 millers having tonnage capacity up to 300 tons to take up this programme and the medium capacity millers also have joined the fray. Up till now, all the major and medium millers have joined the programme by installing the capital equipment ranging from Rs.45000/- to Rs.70000/- through indigenous fabrication. Each Kilogram of flour manufactured by medium and major manufacturers now does carry the logo of fortification and every day fortification of flour has reached up to 1200 tons. To sum up, now the attempt has been to shift the emphasis from

simple calories to nutrition and make it popular in market. We are now moving from this success in open market system to Government run schemes by introducing pilot schemes for ICDS (Integrated Child Development Scheme) and MDM (Master Data Management). The role of MI (Micronutrient Initiative), a NGO backed by Canada and the All India Flour Millers Associations have been quite commendable since it has given the technical guidance from time to time and some financial support to promote the fundamentals of Iron intake in food and we can see flour packs in almost all the corners of the State. All capacities of mills have been utilized and all packs have been fortified. Now, we are moving to a stage to rope in approximately 22000 "Chakkies" or "Ghanties" (vernacular synonym) for achieving universalization of flour fortification. A simple, workable and easy to operate drum made of stainless steel with rotating rod has been designed to do this job and after a process of consultations, it is now sent for demonstration to all districts. The Block level head called Tehsildar/ Mamlatdar who has been demonstrated the same will be asked to motivate the chakki owners to install the drum for premix fortification. These chakki owners would be receiving pre-mix iron and folic pouches through a planned network of supplies supported by the flour millers association which is a major stake holder in this public-private partnership. After wheat is milled in these micro chakkies spread out in the remotest corners it shall be poured into such steel drums where the pre-mix pouches would be added depending on the quantity milled for proper absorption and there after it shall be delivered to the final consumer. It has been estimated that the cost per Kg of wheat milled would not increase beyond 5 paise for such fortification aimed pre-mix iron and folic pouches. The same cost has also been worked out for fortification process in the edible oil at the millers or packers stage and as of now they have decided to absorb the cost and not pass it on to consumers. Market economics in such products would not raise the price tag beyond five paise which would be barely nominal.

This premix in edible oil or flour gets easily mixed and absorbed without intervention of any other ingredient and also marked by a label. All technicalities or blend techniques pertaining to fortification have been fully understood by the partners who are to implement this strategy. One can safely assume that this implementation would universalize the fortification process, check diversion or leakages of wheat and work as an easy and safe agent for healthy nutritive value food which is now beyond the reach of common people. A study has been conducted by Civil Hospital doctors with regard to continuous intake of such fortified flour among 19 top athletes of the state in a sample study. For doing this study, Pre-fortification hemoglobin levels were taken as a reference and after continuous three months consumption of fortified flour, the findings do reveal astonishing impact among them in such a short span. In the long run, the department would also attempt to encourage region specific, habit specific, consumption of coarse grains so that the right local food could reach them but till then this present effort would go a long way in shaping the nutritional profile of this State. Today, 60 to 75% women and adolescent females suffer from anaemia in the State and several crores of rupees are dumped in curing of night

blindness or eye related ailments and bone related problems. Had these efforts not been undertaken, we could expect to have increase in number of night blindness cases and anaemia other than cases of mental disabilities and memory dysfunctions. If statistics are to be relied, up till now 2 lakh MT of edible oil has been fortified and sold in varying sizes and pouches while everyday more than 1000 MT flour is fortified packed and sold. Once the vast network of chakkies spread across the state is included in this programme, all the wheat shall become fortified and this scheme does not cause any costs to the Government. It only involves a change of mind set for implementation and active intervention by all stake holders through a new network for a new goal and a new ambitious mission to achieve the universalization objective. Government has now started internalizing this scheme through ICDS and MDM centres by running quick pilot scheme in few Blocks.

Crucial variably

The most crucial area in the whole process is the role of monitoring and evaluation. Evaluation is the final tally while monitoring is the continued process. This is being done by Association in absence of a separate forum but the capacity building at state level deserves to be done to address questions of storage of pre-mix, detection of quality issues and supply chain related issues or availability of constituents and laboratory samples for final proof of this success. This is an area which needs to be looked at more seriously and Government of India's participation would be more crucial in the coming days.

The Unfinished Mandate

Food will gain value only if value of food gains. For doing this, the departments like Health, Consumer Affairs, Food processing, Social Welfare, Women and Child, Food and Public Distribution, Tribal Development have convergence for a total all pronged committed programme in missionary mode. NGOs have to be activated, industries have to initiate more efforts from all stake holders to create a new like feature web for this theme. This is a social investment with least costs and promises safety and security aborts food diversion and health deficiencies of all kind and provides opportunity for social freedom and health dividends.



- S K Manda